DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 351 SO 033 602

AUTHOR	Gray, Tom
TITLE	Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman. The Constitution Community: Postwar United States (1945 to Early 1970s).
INSTITUTION	National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	21p.; Photographic images may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Archives and Records Administration, 700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20408. Tel: 866-325-7208 (Toll Free); e-mail: inquire@nara.gov. For full text: http://www.nara.gov/education/cc/main.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communism; *Government Role; *National Security; *Primary Sources; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Teacher Developed Materials; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS	Cold War; Congress; McCarthy (Joseph); *Message Responses; *Message Transmission; Truman (Harry S); United States Constitution

ABSTRACT

As soon as World War II ended, the United States and the Soviet Union began a struggle for supremacy. It was against the backdrop of the Cold War that the threat of internal subversion and external attack began to preoccupy Congress. On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy gave a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he claimed to have in his possession information proving that more than 200 employees in the State Department were Communist Party members. This began a campaign during which McCarthy continued to make accusations about communist activity within the executive branch. His 1954 probe of the U.S. Army, televised nationally, led to his downfall. The featured primary source document, a telegram from Senator McCarthy to President Truman, was sent to the President on February 11, 1950. This lesson also includes Truman's reply (probably not sent). The lesson relates to the interaction between the executive and legislative branches dealing with the nation's security and acts that may be determined to be treason (Article III, Section 3, Paragraph 1). It correlates to the National History Standards and to the National Standards for Civics and Government. The lesson provides historical background (four resources); and suggests diverse teaching activities for classroom implementation, including document analysis, research and class discussion, compare and contrast, and extension activities. (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 462 351

National Archives and Records Administration

THE CONSTITUTION COMMUNITY

Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman

By Tom Gray

SO 033 602

National Archives and Records Administration
700 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20408
1-866-325-7208

http://www.nara.gov/education/classrm.html

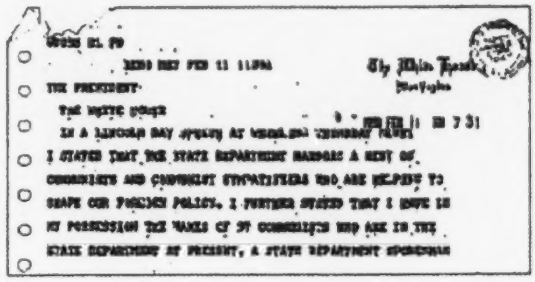
2000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Constitution Community is a partnership between classroom teachers and education specialists from the National Archives and Records Administration. We are developing lessons and activities that address constitutional issues, correlate to national academic standards, and encourage the analysis of primary source documents. The lessons that have been developed are arranged according to historical era.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman



Constitutional Connection

This lesson relates to the interaction between the executive and legislative branches dealing with the security of our nation and acts that may be determined to be treason (Article III, Section 3, Paragraph 1).

This lesson correlates to the National History Standards.

Era 9 -Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

- **Standard 3A** -Demonstrate understanding of the political debates of the post-World War II era.

This lesson correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

Standard III.C.1. -Explain why certain provisions of the Constitution result in tensions among the three branches of government.

Cross-curricular Connections

Share this exercise with your history, government, and language arts colleagues.

List of Documents

1. Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman.
(page 1) (page 2) (page 3) (page 4) (page 5) (page 6)

2. Telegram reply of President Harry S. Truman (probably unsent)

Historical Background

On February 9, 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy stepped into the spotlight of national attention with a speech given at Wheeling, West Virginia. McCarthy was nearing the end of his first term as senator and needed a big issue to energize his run for a second term. Holding up a piece of paper, he claimed to have in his possession information proving that more than 200 employees in the State Department were card-carrying members of the Communist Party. The charge--never substantiated--grabbed headlines at a time when friction with the Soviet Union and fear of communist subversion were growing in the country.

Fear of communism had existed since the 19th century but did not merit congressional investigation until after the Bolshevik Revolution and the close of World War I. In response to the "Red Scare" of 1919 a special Senate committee was convened. During the decade of the 1930s, governments adopted new and experimental techniques to combat the economic ravages of the Great Depression. Communist state economic planning, as well as certain Nazi and fascist economic measures, appealed to some desperate Americans. Some of the experimental programs of Roosevelt's New Deal fostered concerns that the federal government was falling under communist direction. These suspicions and fears led to the creation of a series of temporary House and Senate committees to investigate subversive threats to the government.

During World War II the United States and the Soviet Union were allies, but as soon as the war ended the two superpowers began to struggle against each other for supremacy. It was against the backdrop of this "Cold War" that the threat of internal subversion and external attack began to preoccupy Congress. Anticommunism dominated the political debates of the immediate post-World War II-era. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), established in 1938 to monitor disloyalty to the United States government, was made a permanent committee in 1945. Postwar HUAC investigators probed whether Communists and sympathizers to communism had played an active role in the labor movement, the movie industry, and the executive departments of the federal government.

In 1948, before the HUAC, professed-Communist Whittaker Chambers accused former high-ranking State Department official Alger Hiss of espionage during the 1930s. State Department and other high-level administration officials publicly defended Hiss in his denial of the charges. Then Chambers led investigators to a pumpkin patch where microfilmed secret State Department documents were hidden. The media-charged proceedings that followed and the 1950 conviction of Hiss on charges of perjury (the

merits of the case are still debated today) linked Communist activity and high government officials in the minds of many Americans. This case further fueled the anticommunist hysteria in the nation.

During the weeks before McCarthy delivered his Wheeling speech, China had fallen to the Communists and the Soviet Union had tested an atomic bomb. With Alger Hiss's perjury conviction and the confession of Klaus Fuchs, a physicist on the Manhattan Project, to having delivered atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, it was clear that government security had been compromised. Particularly disturbing to average citizens was the Soviet Union's new atomic capability. Fearful Americans began to view all communists as traitors to our country. The stage was set for the freshman senator from Wisconsin.

Senator McCarthy was placed on the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Senate Committee on Governmental Operations and became its chairman in 1953. At the time of his chairmanship, the jurisdiction of the subcommittee was principally the investigation of waste, inefficiency, impropriety, and illegality of government operations. McCarthy manipulated the workings of the new committee to continue sweeping accusations of communist activity in the executive branch. His 1954 probe of the U.S. Army lead to his downfall. The Army-McCarthy hearings were televised nationally, and the public recoiled from McCarthy's bullying tactics. He was censured by the Senate and died in 1957.

The featured document, a telegram from Senator Joseph R. McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, was sent to the president on February 11, 1950, two days after the Wheeling speech. Also included is Truman's reply (probably unsent). In this telegram to the president, Senator McCarthy repeats his assertion that he had the names of 57 Communists who were working in the State Department and called upon the President to provide Congress with a full accounting of Communist infiltration of the Department, including the role of alleged Communist spy Alger Hiss in protecting security risks. In an undated (and apparently unsent) reply, the President stated that McCarthy was not fit to serve in the U.S. government, adding that the people of Wisconsin must be very sorry to be represented in the Senate by such a person.

Resources

Educational Units

National Archives and Sirs, Inc., The Truman Years 1945-1953

National Archives and Sirs, Inc., Peace and Prosperity 1953-1961

Books

Manchester, William. *Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of the United States 1932-1972*. New York: Bantam, 1974.

Rosenberg, Norman L. and Rosenberg, Emily S., *In Our Times: America Since World War II*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991.

Teaching Activities

Document Analysis

1. Divide the document into two separate parts: pages 1-5 of the telegram and page 6. First, distribute pages 1-5 to students. Read the document with the class paying special attention to the meaning of the following vocabulary as they pertain to the telegram: "fellow traveler," bed-fellow, McCarthyism, "guilt by association," "secret denunciation," blacklisting, browbeating, "point of order."

After reading pages 1-5, ask students what they think motivated McCarthy to send this telegram. Record the results of this discussion on the board (might place focus on patriotism and hatred of communism).

Next, distribute page 6 of the telegram and instruct students to read independently. Ask students whether it suggests any different motivations, and add the new suggestions to the list on the board.

Ask students to write a brief response to McCarthy's telegram as though they were President Truman. Ask student volunteers to read their letter to the class.

(Note: a copy of President Truman's unsent response is in Document 2.)

Research and Class Discussion

2. Ask students to research the McCarthy hearings to determine the following: time frame of hearings, how they were broadcast, how the press reacted, and how the American people reacted in light of the Korean Conflict and the Cold War, and the work of investigative reporters like Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly (CBS). Instruct students to report their findings in a class discussion.

3. Remind students that the featured document was a telegram and the hearings were broadcast by radio and early television, as well as covered by the press. Lead the class in a discussion using the following questions: Would McCarthy have had as big an impact if he had lived in the 1750s, an era with only limited press coverage, when exchanges would have been by the slow postal service? What impact might McCarthy have in today's information-saturated age, with CNN, cable and broadcast television, faxes, e-mail, and the Internet?

Direct students to discuss Edward R. Murrow's investigative journalism, especially his 1952 expose on the vicious practices of McCarthy and the work of the CBS team Murrow and Friendly on "See It Now," a forerunner of today's program "60 Minutes."

Compare and Contrast

4. Divide students into small groups of 4-5. Assign each group a different instance when political, racial, or ethnic minorities were persecuted by government officials. Examples include the 1692 Salem witch trials, Reconstruction-era vigilantism, and post-WWI events, such as the Red Scare, Sacco-Vanzetti trial, and revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Direct students to use library and Internet resources to determine when their instance occurred, how many people were involved, what persecution techniques were used, and what historians today say were the causes and results. Construct a chart on the board labeled with these categories and ask a representative from each group to complete the chart with the information they obtained. Lead a class discussion in which students identify similarities and differences.

Class Discussion

5. Inform the students that President Eisenhower eventually used executive privilege and constitutional protections deriving from the principle of "separation of powers" to curtail McCarthy. As the Army-McCarthy hearings approached in 1954, President Eisenhower wrote the secretary of defense:

> "Because it is essential to efficient and effective administration that employees of the Executive Branch be completely candid in advising each other on official matters, and because it is not in the public interest that any of their conversations or communications, or any documents or reproductions concerning such advice be disclosed, you will instruct employees of your Department that in all of their appearances before the Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Government Operations regarding the inquiry now before it they are not to testify to any such conversations or communications or to produce any such documents or reproduction."

Explain to students that later presidents, including Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton, had difficulty in maintaining claims of executive privilege for members of the executive branch during congressional hearings.

Discuss the following questions with students:
a. Was Eisenhower correct in ordering Army officers not to testify before McCarthy?
b. Do you think that Nixon's, Reagan's, and Clinton's problems associated with executive privilege claims were related to the opposition party's having control of Congress?
c. In what other instances in history has political control had a strong impact on decisions that have had such a strong effect on the American public?

Extension Activities

6. Assign students to research and report on one of the following:
a. The relationship between President Truman and Senator McCarthy from the time of the telegram until Truman left office in 1953.

b. The effects of the McCarthy "witch hunt" on the life of a famous American who was blacklisted following investigation.
c. The relationship between McCarthyism and Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*. Collaborate with a language arts colleague to develop interdisciplinary activities on this topic.

The document included in this project is from the Harry S. Truman Library. It is available online through the National Archives Information Locator (NAIL) [http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html] database, control number NLT-PSF-19500211. NAIL is a searchable database that contains information about a wide variety of NARA holdings across the country. You can use NAIL to search record descriptions by keywords or topics and retrieve digital copies of selected textual documents, photographs, maps, and sound recordings related to thousands of topics.

This article was written by Tom Gray, a teacher at DeRuyter Central Middle School in DeRuyter, NY.

WB035 DL PD

RENO NEV FEB 11 1139A

The White House
Washington

THE PRESIDENT

THE WHITE HOUSE

1950 FEB 11 PM 7 31

IN A LINCOLN DAY SPEECH AT WHEELING THURSDAY NIGHT I STATED THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT HARBORS A NEST OF COMMUNISTS AND COMMUNIST SYMPATHIZERS WHO ARE HELPING TO SHAPE OUR FOREIGN POLICY. I FURTHER STATED THAT I HAVE IN MY POSSESSION THE NAMES OF 57 COMMUNISTS WHO ARE IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT AT PRESENT. A STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 1.

...TLY DENIED THIS AND CLAIMED THAT THERE IS NOT A SINGLE COMMUNIST IN THE DEPARTMENT. YOU CAN CONVINCE YOURSELF OF THE FALSITY OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT CLAIM VERY EASILY. YOU WILL RECALL THAT YOU PERSONALLY APPOINTED A BOARD TO SCREEN STATE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES FOR THE PURPOSE OF WEEDING OUT FELLOW TRAVELERS. YOUR BOARD DID A PAINS-TAKING JOB. AND NAMED HUNDREDS WHICH IT LISTED AS "DANGEROUS TO THE SECURITY OF THE NATION", BECAUSE OF COMMUNISTIC CONNECTIONS.

WHILE THE RECORDS ARE NOT AVAILABLE TO ME, I KNOW

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 2.

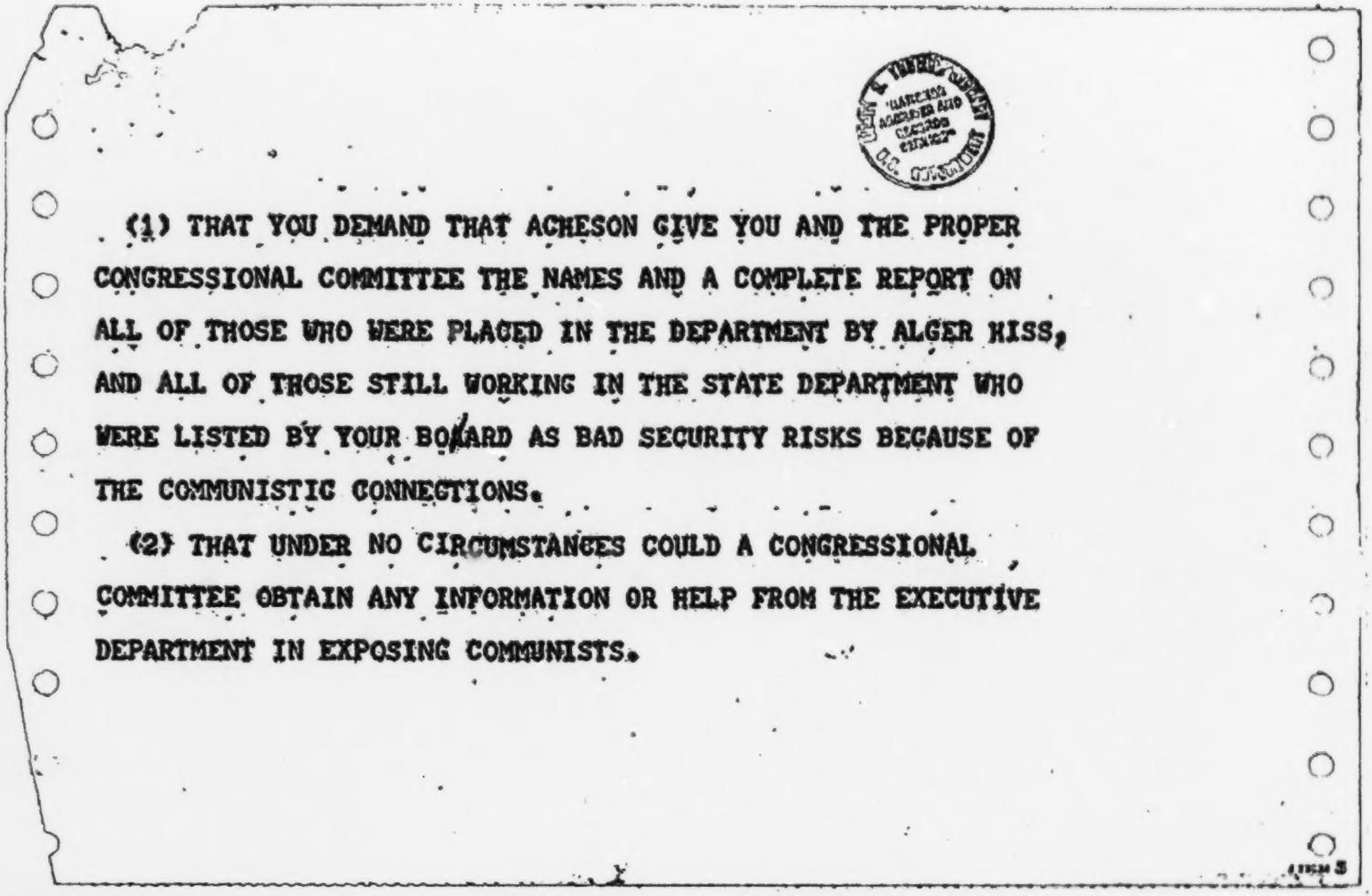
A[illegible]ELY THAT OF ONE GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 300 CERTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY FOR DISCHARGE, HE ACTUALLY DISCHARGED ONLY APPROXIMATELY 80. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS WAS DONE AFTER LENGTHY CONSULTATION WITH ALGER HISS. I WOULD SUGGEST THEREFORE, MR. PRESIDENT, THAT YOU SIMPLY PICK UP YOUR PHONE AND ASK MR. ACHESON HOW MANY OF THOSE WHOM YOUR BOARD HAD LABELED AS DANGEROUS, HE FAILED TO DISCHARGE. THE DAY THE HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE EXPOSED ALGER HISS AS AN IMPORTANT LINK IN AN INTER-NATIONAL COMMUNIST SPY RING, YOU SIGNED AN ORDER FORBIDDING THE

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 3.

S

TATE DEPARTMENTS GIVING TO THE CONGRESS ANY INFORMATION IN REGARD TO THE DISLOYALTY OR THE COMMUNISTIC CONNECTIONS OF ANYONE IN THAT DEPARTMENT, DISPITE THIS STATE DEPARTMENT BLACKOUT, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COMPILE A LIST OF 57 COMMUNISTS IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT. THIS LIST IS AVAILABLE TO YOU, BUT YOU CAN GET A MUCH LONGER LIST BY ORDERING THE SECRETARY ACHESON TO GIVE YOU A LIST OF THESE WHOM YOUR OWN BOARD LISTED AS BEING DISLOYAL, AND WHO ARE STILL WORKING IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT. I BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING IS THE MINIMUM WHICH CAN BE EXPECTED OF YOU IN THIS CASE

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 4.



(1) THAT YOU DEMAND THAT ACHESON GIVE YOU AND THE PROPER CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE THE NAMES AND A COMPLETE REPORT ON ALL OF THOSE WHO WERE PLACED IN THE DEPARTMENT BY ALGER HISS, AND ALL OF THOSE STILL WORKING IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT WHO WERE LISTED BY YOUR BOARD AS BAD SECURITY RISKS BECAUSE OF THE COMMUNISTIC CONNECTIONS.

(2) THAT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES COULD A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE OBTAIN ANY INFORMATION OR HELP FROM THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT IN EXPOSING COMMUNISTS.

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 5.

FAILURE ON YOUR PART WILL LABEL THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF BEING THE BED-FELLOW OF INTER-NATIONAL COMMUNISM. CERTAINLY THIS LABEL IS NOT DESERVED BY THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF LOYAL AMERICAN DEMOCRATS THROUGHOUT THE NATION, AND BY THE SIZABLE NUMBER OF ABLE LOYAL DEMOCRATS IN BOTH THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE

JOE MC CARTHY U.S.S. WIS..

Document 1: Telegram from Senator Joseph McCarthy to President Harry S. Truman, page 6.

Draft

McCarthy

File

My dear Senator:

I read your telegram of February eleventh from Reno, Nevada with a great deal of interest and this is the first time in my experience, and I was ten years in the Senate, that I ever heard of a Senator trying to discredit his own Government before the world. You know that isn't done by honest public officials. Your telegram is not only not true and an insolent approach to a situation that should have been worked out between man and man but it shows conclusively that you are not even fit to have a hand in the operation of the Government of the United States.

I am very sure that the people of Wisconsin are extremely sorry that they are represented by a person who has as little sense of responsibility as you have.

Sincerely yours,

[HST]

Document 2: Truman's Reply to McCarthy (probably unsent)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE